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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

Executive Registry

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20 September 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger  
Assistant to the President  
(National Security Affairs)

SUBJECT : Vietnam: A Look at Hanoi's Intentions

1. Attached per your request are CIA's views on the analysis of INR consultant Fred Greene concerning Hanoi's intentions in the next year or two.

2. As you will note, we are in basic agreement with Mr. Greene's paper. We believe that Hanoi intends at a minimum gradually to intensify the level of military conflict in South Vietnam. We further believe that, while the evidence is inconclusive this long in advance, it is only prudent to anticipate that the North Vietnamese may revert to major offensive action in 1975 or 1976.

/s/ Bill

W. E. Colby  
Director

Attachment as stated

cc: R. H. Miller, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State  
R. Smyser, NSC Staff  
W. Stearman, NSC Staff

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SUBJECT: CIA Comments on Department of State Briefing Memorandum  
Entitled Vietnam: A Look at Hanoi's Intentions (S/S 7416027)  
(Attached)

Distribution:

Original - Addressee

- 1 - R. H. Miller, Dep Ass't Secretary of State
- 1 - R. Smyser, NSC Staff
- 1 - W. Stearman, NSC Staff
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ORIG: OCI:

(20 September 1974)

September 20, 1974

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: CIA Comments on Department of State Briefing Memorandum

Entitled Vietnam: A Look at Hanoi's Intentions (S/S 7416027)

1. Mr. Greene's paper presents a logical and plausible projection of Hanoi's intentions and is in basic agreement with our own assessments of the situation in South Vietnam.

- The Communists, thanks largely to their improved logistic position, their continued infiltration of personnel, and their enhanced AAA posture (and a corresponding decline in the GVN's relative air capabilities), have been able to maintain and even expand their territorial holdings in some areas of the country and successfully defend them against government counterattack. They are still limited, however, essentially to remote, empty, and border-contiguous regions.
- If present trends continue, the Communists will be able to move somewhat closer to major urban areas and key roads and to increase military pressure on the GVN.

2. Although North Vietnam has the capability to launch a major conventional attack in several defined areas along the lines of the 1972 offensive with relatively little warning, the evidence and reasoning Mr. Greene presents makes a strong case that Hanoi has for the time being opted for some type of open-ended "intermediate" military campaign. As Mr. Greene argues, such a course would pose less risk of a negative Chinese or Soviet (or U.S.) reaction, and perhaps more importantly, would be less likely to interfere with what Hanoi perceives to be a well-established trend of diminishing U.S. support for Saigon.

3. On the other hand, Mr. Greene's memorandum appears to overstate some aspects of the threat posed by a middle range of Communist military action.

- The statement that the GVN holds only "a relatively slight edge" over the NVA in terms of main force units is true only if the NVA reserve divisions in the north are included in the calculation.
- The main force balance in South Vietnam continues to favor the GVN by a relatively wide margin.

- The bulk of the NVA reserve would probably not be sent south as long as Hanoi is pursuing an "intermediate" military approach.
- The guerrilla/territorial underpinnings of a military contest currently favor the GVN.
- It is doubtful that a continuation or gradual intensification of the present level of combat would pose unacceptable burdens to the morale of government forces.
- It is also doubtful that the NVA would be particularly effective in targetting against individual units "hardest hit by corruption."
- There is little evidence of any deterioration of GVN will or cohesion.

4. Although Hanoi is in a good position to fight a war of attrition, we question whether a gradual increase in the level of military pressure, even if accompanied by further limited Communist territorial gains, would seriously threaten the stability of the GVN leadership or cause Thieu in the foreseeable future to consider meeting the Communists' political demands.

- It does not seem likely that Hanoi's primary objective in an "intermediate" military campaign would be to force Saigon to accept "territorial demarcation" and a "tripartite coalition."
- Hanoi does not see its options solely in military terms, but there is considerable evidence that the Communists are pessimistic about achieving an eventual takeover of South Vietnam through political means.
- In short, the Communists' present course in South Vietnam is, over time, more likely to lead directly to a return to major military action. To the extent such action is limited geographically, it will be more easily handled by Saigon; but a countrywide action will be correspondingly difficult for Hanoi to mount and sustain so as to become effective.

5. Mr. Greene suggests that Hanoi could decide to conclude an intermediate combat stage and launch a major offensive either in 1975 or 1976. We concur in this judgment, and believe it is only prudent to anticipate a major offensive in 1975 or in 1976. Hanoi in fact probably has not yet committed itself to any specific time frame for a return to major military action. The Communists would be reluctant to abandon a "middle-range" military strategy until they are confident that a major offensive would result in battlefield gains that could bring Saigon to its knees in a relatively

- 2 -

short time. Such a judgment would hinge heavily on two factors: the outcome of the intermediate combat stages and Hanoi's reading of the depth of future U.S. assistance for Saigon.

6. Communist Strategy and the Sufficiency of Contemplated US Aid Levels:  
Although recent Congressional actions on U.S. aid levels have resulted in some reduction in RVNAF's effectiveness, this is not likely to be a critical problem during FY 1975 as long as the Communists do no more than gradually increase the present scale of military activity. In the event of a major Communist military offensive, however, the RVNAF would have significant difficulties in countering the offensive without a substantial surge in U.S. logistical assistance.

- 3 -

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Next 6 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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